Poland of Today—Strong, Well Established

Intense Nationalism and Intolerance of Bolshevism Aid Nation's Statesmen in Their Task

By SYDNEY ROBERTS

OF ALL the new born states or reborn states, Poland is the largest. Of them all, her position makes her the most important. Poland today is the problem and the promise of the Old World. Three phases of Poland may be considered. First of all, her actual social and economic condition today; second, her present political situation; third, the men who guide the country through its great days.

When the Great War began, Poland was a battle field for two powers—Russia and Germany—neither of whom had any particular reason to exercise any care for the land in which they operated. The changing fortunes of war, as well as the peculiar character of Poland's inhabitants, made able local government necessary; and this the Poles themselves supplied, with the tacit approval and co-operation of the foreign occupants. To this valuable experience is attributed partly Poland's readiness and fitness to grasp her freedom the moment it was ripe.

Another important factor was the early formation of a Polish army. This was comprised of the famous Legions of General Pilsudski, small at first, but with a remarkable history. Of course, Germany, Austria and Russia, all had levied from the youth of Poland for their armies; yet there was found the nucleus for the Legions which, unable to fight for the Allies, still refused to fight for the Central Powers—for which refusal the Germans, on one occasion, interned the Legions and imprisoned Pilsudski. There was, however, in France a Polish volunteer army.

The Legions, in fact, were formed solely to serve Poland, and were ready to wage war impartially against Poland's chief oppressors, Russia and Prussia. There were enemies on all sides. The Austrians, Polish allies, in watching the common front against Russia were not to be trusted; the Germans were openly hostile to Pilsudski; and the Russians were especially resentful, because most of the men in Pilsudski's Legions were technically Russian subjects.

The Legions, small as they were, retained their identity, this being possible through the support accorded them by the civilian population through what was known as the Polish Military Organization.

Poland Was Ready

IT WILL be remembered that in 1917 the Central Powers proclaimed a partial Polish independence within the limits of the old Russian Poland. Of several such overtures made by the Central Powers, the one to Poland was the most promptly seized and eagerly developed. Poland was ready.

Consequently today Poland is the Poland of the Legions; in other words, the national spirit that formed and sustained the Legions, is the national spirit now of all Poland.

It is now a century since Warsaw was really free, and the seat of an unhampered government. The underlying unity of national tradition and of language (Poland has comparatively few dialects) strengthened the hands of the leaders, and the advance in government has been notable. The new Polish Minister of Education, for example, has picked up the thread of the work instituted by "The Commission of Education" in 1773, and the universities are already experiencing a renaissance. Poland now has 16 higher educational institutions, six of them universities. These are Cracow, Lemberg (Lwow), Warsaw, Vilna, Posen and Lublin—the last the only new one, although the others, except Cracow and Lemberg, have been closed down. More than 6,000 students flocked to Warsaw in the autumn of 1919, seeking admittance.

The parliament, known as the *Seym*, is elected by universal suffrage, and the membership includes six women from scattered districts of Poland. It is a good working body, although the ministry is handicapped by an inadequate constitution.

The ministries of War and Supplies are running smoothly, although the latter, of course, has tremendous problems to face, and holds perhaps the whole fate of Polish fortune in its hands. The Ministry of Supplies has to to see industries restarted, has to obtain raw materials, has to look around for credits, has to consider the food shortage. And here, of course, begin Poland's inter-relations with the larger powers.

Poland always has been the special protégée of France. French policy has aimed, and aims more definitely today, to make Poland a strong link in the powerful ring with which she desires to surround Germany. It was largely due to French influence that Eastern Galicia—inhabited mainly by Ukrainians—was assigned to the Poles, and the French Mission has looked favorably on the varied attempts to enforce the old Polish-Lithuanian union. French officers have reorganized the army, and French influence, if not paramount at Warsaw, has lost no opportunity to become so by dwelling on the fact that in no single instance has France contradicted a Polish claim.

Britain, on the other hand, has not been quite so partial to Poland, although distinctly friendly. In fact the two countries represent in a way the two divisions of thought in Poland itself. Britain favors the Pilsudski wing, a rather cautious group inclined to stick close to the homeland and develop a strictly Polish state; France leans a little to the more brilliant imagination of the Imperialist Nationalists of Poland who dream much of a powerful Poland, which shall reach out and absorb all the territory historically attached to ancient Poland.

It is quite true that a certain section of Polish politicians are frankly Imperialist; they are not the ruling group. But they exist, and to them an anti-Bolshevik campaign implies not so much the crushing of Sovietism, as the chance for Poland, with Allied support, to dominate the Baltic League, incorporate Lithuania, and annex large tracts of non-Polish country.

It was through the unhappy movements of this group that Poland sometimes got into bad odor at Paris, and that Pilsudski's plans for conciliating Lithuania came to nothing.

As a matter of plain fact, Poland is doing excellently with what she has, but is in no position to attempt more.

The army numbers about 700,000 but is poorly equipped; the country is in narrow financial straits, as might be expected, and the typhus is taking heavy toll. These things certainly oppose any adventures by the Polish Imperialist wing.

The truth is that the mass of Polish people have no desire to fight anyone, and a considerable section is in favor of an amicable, even generous, solution of the nationality questions. The best section of the new nation is that of the ex-Prussians who have evidenced no desire at all to pose as a great power, or revive departed glories. They seek chiefly to continue harmonious development in security and peace. So far, the Polish nation itself cannot be accused of rabid imperialism. There has been some talk of Polish occupation of Russian territory, but up to date they are well within historic boundaries in that direction; the Dvinsk campaign was designed to clear the enemy from Latvian territory; and the Poles probably will evacuate Lithuania under Allied pressure, and their own good sense.

Three Strong Men

THUS there is good reason for the world to support the moderate group ruling Poland, even if it means insisting on an end to the understanding between the Polish Imperialists and interested French parties.

The three men chiefly responsible for Polish affairs, in the eyes of the world, are Paderewski, Pilsudski, and Skulski.

The first is called Poland's "strong man," and is variously described as a compelling patriot and a scheming charlatan. The former probably is correct, for he certainly has given unmistakable evidence of patriotism, while the charge that he aspires to a throne in Poland has yet to be justified.

At the time of the Russian Revolution in 1905, Pilsudski was a Socialist, and took an active part in spreading the principles of revolution in Russian Poland. After the attempt had failed, Pilsudski fled, with many others in like case, to Austria where he continued his efforts to restore liberty to Russian Poland.

So far as the world is concerned his next appearance was late in 1914 when, with the beginning of the Great War, he organized a Legion of Austrian Poles to operate against Russia—on the Polish frontier. They fought well.

When Germany decreed the independence of Russian Poland, Pilsudski was ordered to turn his Legion over to the German Army, every man to take an oath of allegiance to the German and Austrian Emperors. Pilsudski refused. The Germans split up the Legions and put Pilsudski in prison.

He was released two days before the signing of the armistice and was welcomed as a hero by Warsaw. Pilsudski became the head of the Polish Government, and formed a Socialist cabinet, headed by Mr. Moraczewski. A few days later Paderewski reached Warsaw and from then on practically dictated Pilsudski's policy. Paderewski's easy assumption of authority was based on the fact that he was supported by the Allied Powers. Confidence in Paderewski led the world to regard the Polish situation sympathetically, and in January, 1919, the United States was the first to recognize Poland as an independent nation.

There was much talk of friction between Pilsudski and Paderewski, and it may well have been true. If Pilsudski was responsible, however, for Paderewski's resignation, the pianist-statesman was strong enough to dominate who should succeed him; and he chose Skulski. He is a young man, strong, able, energetic; not such a match for President Pilsudski as was Paderewski; but, supported by a powerful public opinion, able so far to hold Poland to its policy of internal reconstruction in which Pilsudski, to a certain extent, heartily concurs.

The important thing to the world is that the sanity shown by the Poles themselves in composing their affairs justifies the Powers in assuming that Poland is to be an important nation, exercising a stabilizing influence over the whole of Continental Europe. This is not necessarily an exaggeration. Poland's position is of tremendous, strategic importance — for war or peace. In peace, wisely administered, she could compel adherence to international consideration of disputes and in other ways provide a check on the adventurous ambitions of other powers.

Poland's chance is great; her spirit is willing; and the world is sympathetic. It looks as if one nation, at least, has justified her claims.

Flying Over the Alps

(C) G. S., N. Y.

THIS is how the earth appeared looking straight down upon it in the Alps region. The cities were mere ant hills in the crevices, and the planet proper was like an upheaved mass, its hollows filled with the waters which men call seas. This photograph was taken at a height of 4,000 meters. Two aeroplanes were making the "hop" over the Alps, and one photographed the other.